CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.593
30 May 1991

ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE FIVE HUNDRED AND NINETY-THIRD PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 30 May 1991, at 10 a.m.

President: Miss Tessa A.H. Solesby (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)

GE.91-61026/0349H

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 593rd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

To begin with I would like to make a short statement opening the presidency of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This is a rather special moment for me, the first session in which I fill the post of presidency of the Conference. I am of course very aware that it is an honour which arrives with the passage of time, rather than as a result of any qualities of the incumbent. But despite this, to preside over this Conference, with all it stands for in global disarmament, is a very real honour. My own Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the Honourable Douglas Hogg, will be addressing the Conference this time next week. I shall therefore limit my own comments today to primarily technical matters.

My turn in this Chair has come in the middle of our spring session. Thanks to the efficiency of my predecessors, Ambassador Batsanov and those who went before him, the structure of the Conference's work is already well in place. The ad hoc committees on the nuclear test ban, on chemical weapons, on prevention of an arms race in outer space, on effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons and on radiological weapons are all functioning smoothly. Informal plenary discussions on the cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament and on prevention of nuclear war are being held on a regular basis. Ambassador Marín Bosch of Mexico has been undertaking consultations as Special Coordinator on the comprehensive programme of disarmament and I shall ask him to continue to do that. Ambassador Kamal of Pakistan has already held two open-ended consultations on improved and effective functioning and has announced plans for further such meetings. I myself shall continue the practice of my predecessors in holding consultations on proposals for expanding the membership of the Conference. In other words, this Conference is on automatic control and it is left to the pilot to make only small adjustments should any become necessary.

It is a time of particularly high expectations for the Ad Hoc Committee on Chemical Weapons. Important developments have recently taken place which hold out the hope of accelerated progress. The Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Chemical Weapons has already begun consultations on possible changes to the organization of work in order to respond fully to these new opportunities. I intend to support Ambassador Batsanov in this task in the hope of reaching agreement among us all in the very near future. We are fortunate in having such a dynamic Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Chemical Weapons. I should like to pay a tribute to the leadership he has given during the past month in the presidency of the Conference as a whole. It provided further proof that leadership of our important chemical weapons negotiations is in excellent hands.

I am lucky to be able to rely on the help and cooperation of members of the President's bureau, as well as the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference. My aim will be to do whatever I can to assist progress in all aspects of the Conference agenda. I am at the disposal

(The President)

of any distinguished delegate who may wish to consult. This is an important month for the work of the Conference. I look forward to cooperating with you all in order to ensure we make the most of the opportunities before us.

I have on my list of speakers today the representatives of Senegal and Cuba, and I would now like to give the floor to the representative of Senegal, Ambassador Sene.

Mr. SENE (Senegal) (translated from French): Madam President, allow me first of all to congratulate you very warmly upon your accession to the very important post of President of the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation is very happy to see you presiding over our work during this crucial phase of this session of the Conference on Disarmament, in which, as you yourself have just said, new and important factors offer us hope that progress will make it possible to speed up our response to certain expectations of the international community. I am convinced that under your leadership the work of the Conference will continue in a positive and constructive spirit. Allow me also to express our gratitude to your predecessor, Ambassador Batsanov, who skilfully presided over the work of the Conference during the month of May.

In the more than 10 years that this negotiating forum has existed in its present form, the Conference on Disarmament has experienced difficulties thus far in concluding a treaty or an agreement in any of the eight fields with which it deals, and the only negotiations under way relate to the prohibition of chemical weapons, bearing in mind that significant progress is being made in other forums, a fact which is sure to give impetus to the functioning of the Conference on Disarmament. This appears all the more paradoxical in that, for the first time since the Second World War, definite optimism seems to prevail as a result of the rapprochement between the two world super-Powers and the end of the certainties of the Cold War. Unfortunately, the end of the East-West confrontation has not resulted in the strengthening of stability and peace in the world as we had hoped, and the tragic example of the Gulf war in the wake of the aggression against Kuwait reminds us that the rest of the world is not free of regional conflicts and strategic imbalances, and Africa in that respect is also a theatre to which we can turn our attention in order to reflect on these facts.

At any rate the question of chemical weapons, which will be the main subject of my statement, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction more generally, the abnormal build-up of conventional weapons in certain regions of the world as well as poverty and hunger, the destruction or degradation of our environment, all these today are subjects of great concern and these issues represent the most serious threats currently facing mankind. As the single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament, the Conference on Disarmament will be judged above all on the basis of its ability and capacity to respond positively to these concerns. As regards the problem of chemical weapons, which will be the subject of my statement, the threat of the use of such weapons during the Gulf war highlighted once again, and in a dramatic manner, the urgent need to conclude a convention completely and totally banning chemical weapons. My country, Senegal, shares the concern of the international community at the delay in concluding the negotiations. The

(Mr. Sene, Senegal)

hopes raised by the Paris Conference which was a success on the subject of chemical weapons were clearly very quickly dashed, as was the euphoria prompted by the signing in June 1990 by the United States of America and the Soviet Union of a bilateral agreement on the cessation of the manufacture of chemical weapons and the destruction of the major part of their chemical weapon stockpiles.

The Government of the Republic of Senegal has made an unreserved commitment to a ban which would make chemical weapons illegal and ban their use. International security would be strengthened by a binding multilateral commitment which would guarantee all parties that they will not be threatened by these terrible weapons. The future convention, while protecting civilian chemical industry and encouraging international cooperation in the peaceful uses of chemicals, should in the first place provide primarily for the complete destruction of existing arsenals and prohibit the use of these weapons. To do that it will have to be universal and non-discriminatory.

Our negotiations have reached a critical phase in which issues are now approached in a spirit that is more constructive than ever before. Thus we listened very carefully to the statement delivered on 16 May by Ambassador Stephen Ledogar of the United States on the proposals made by President Bush. I should like to take this opportunity to state my delegation's appreciation of this welcome initiative on the part of the United States and its President. This initiative marks very important progress which will very definitely give a beneficial boost to our negotiations. We are certain that this new development will contribute to stepping up our work on all items currently under negotiation. The change that has been noted in the American position has taken place at the very time when it has been proved that chemical weapons are not able to guarantee the security of the States that possess them. We therefore welcome very positively the decision of the United States to drop its insistence on the "right of retaliation". This decision, which goes beyond the obligations set forth in the Geneva Protocol of 1925, offers us the advantage of putting an end to the debate on the need for States to have an adequate chemical weapons stockpile for measures of reprisals. The use of these weapons can therefore no longer be justified by mitigating circumstances. The fact that this proposal includes severe measures to be taken against those who have not, after a reasonable period of time, signed the convention after its entry into force is also a new and positive element which must be taken into account. My delegation, moreover, fully subscribes to the procedural proposal made by the United States that the session should be held without interruption so that the convention can be finalized by the end of this year.

My delegation is particularly optimistic that the convention will be completed very quickly since very interesting proposals have been submitted by a number of delegations. Thus in his statement delivered on 16 May 1991, the distinguished representative of Sweden, Ambassador Carl-Magnus Hyltenius, whom we have always appreciated for his work and his positive contributions throughout the length of our Conference, submitted a proposal on the expansion of the membership of the Conference. We hope that this proposal will help us

(Mr. Sene, Senegal)

to settle this issue, which has been pending for a long time. Another proposal that should earn the Conference's full attention is the proposal presented on 23 May 1991 by the distinguished representative of Peru in the form of a working paper on challenge inspections or inspections on request (CD/CW/WP.337).

Today, the delegation of Senegal is very pleased to note that the vast majority of delegations feel we are approaching the final objective - the prompt conclusion of a universal and non-discriminatory convention on chemical weapons. Under your skilful and devoted guidance, Madam President, we are sure that we fill find positive solutions to the major issues of inspections on request and universal accession to the convention, as well as other equally important outstanding issues such as the protection and decontamination of the environment, particularly during the process of destruction of the major CW arsenals. At the global level the principled proposals of the delegation of Senegal on the nuclear test ban, the cessation of the nuclear arms race and the prevention of nuclear war, including the mandates of the ad hoc committees dealing with these issues, have remained unchanged and are well known to all and reflect the positions that have been upheld by the Group of 21.

In conclusion, let me say that the peoples of the entire world today jointly aspire to rid mankind of weapons of mass destruction. To that end, the conclusion of the negotiations on a convention for the complete prohibition and total destruction of chemical weapons in so far as the way is now open is a major undertaking which the international community has entrusted to the Conference on Disarmament. The current evolution of the international situation provides new proof of the importance and urgency of discharging this responsibility without delay. The delegation of Senegal would like to reiterate that the key to the success of our negotiations lies in firm commitment to the fundamental objective of the complete prohibition and total destruction of chemical weapons. It goes without saying that this objective includes the unconditional prohibition of the use of these weapons, and their total destruction. We are convinced that we will achieve this objective if all parties to the negotiations uphold this commitment by engaging in serious and pragmatic talks and fully demonstrating their political will. The Conference on Disarmament needs to achieve decisive progress to maintain its prestige as a negotiating forum. This session should be action-oriented so as to achieve concrete results.

In conclusion, let me say that Senegal has set itself the objective of working actively for the rapid conclusion of such a convention on chemical weapons. My delegation will continue as in the past to cooperate with other delegations in a constructive and serious spirit for this purpose, to share the concept of general and monitored disarmament so as to strengthen collective security and peace in the world.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Senegal for his statement and also for the kinds words to myself. I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba, Señora Bauta Solés, who will make a statement on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mrs. BAUTA SOLES (Cuba) (translated from Spanish): My delegation's first words this morning, Madam President, go to express my delegation's satisfaction at seeing you take up the responsibility at the head of our Conference. The Cuban delegation will have occasion during your term of office to cooperate closely with you in the pursuit of the objectives you have set forth this morning before this Conference. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to thank the Ambassador of the Soviet Union, Ambassador Batsanov, for the excellent work he performed in the same office during the preceding period.

I have requested the floor today to read out a statement by the Group of 21 on the comprehensive programme of disarmament. I shall now read the statement in English.

(continued in English)

"As stated during the plenary meeting of last 31 July, the Group of 21 has always attached great importance to the conclusion of the comprehensive programme of disarmament. Consultations carried out at the beginning of the present CD session indicate that, even though consensus is elusive on this matter, the majority of delegations members of the Conference on Disarmament would favour the continuation and conclusion of the work on item 8 of our agenda.

"The trend that would seem to prevail in the Conference on Disarmament when assessing the present international situation indicates that circumstances are considered propitious for progress in disarmament negotiations and the comprehensive programme should not be considered an exception. Moreover, recent statements on the future of the Conference on Disarmament's work would suggest that matters of concern to some delegations already have an adequate context in which to be pursued and enough background work from which to benefit. The guidelines derived from the General Assembly resolutions are adequate for the pursuance of the conclusion of the comprehensive programme of disarmanent, as indicated in General Assembly resolution 45/62 E, which 'requests the Conference on Disarmament to re-establish, at the beginning of its 1991 session, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Comprehensive Programme of Disarmament'. I have taken the floor today to reiterate the Group of 21's firm adherence to the above-mentioned request."

(continued in Spanish)

This is the end of the Group of 21's statement.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Cuba for her statement and also for the kind words to myself. That concludes the list of speakers for today. Does any other member wish to take the floor? I give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. ECKERSLEY (Australia): I would like to make a brief statement on behalf of the Western Group of countries, also on the subject of the comprehensive programme of disarmament.

In its last report to the Conference on Disarmament, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Comprehensive Programme of Disarmament noted in its consensus conclusions that it should "resume work with a view to resolving the outstanding issues in the near future, when circumstances are more conducive to making progress in this regard". The Western Group of countries believes that circumstances now are not more conducive to making progress on a comprehensive programme of disarmament than they were in 1989. Furthermore, the Western Group considers that the practice adopted by the Conference last year, whereby the comprehensive programme of disarmament was considered at plenary meetings of the Conference on Disarmament, continues to be the most appropriate procedure to follow with regard to the comprehensive programme of disarmament this year.

The distinguished delegate of Cuba in her statement made reference to United Nations General Assembly resolution 45/62 E, and it is true that the issue of the comprehensive programme of disarmament was again considered during the most recent session of the United Nations General Assembly. The Western Group would like to draw the Conference's attention to the several negative votes, and even more abstentions, recorded for resolution 45/62 E. This result was at variance with the high levels of support recorded in earlier years for resolutions on this question, and underlines further that circumstances are not more conducive now to making progress on a comprehensive programme of disarmament than they were in 1989. Indeed, this serves to demonstrate clearly that there is no consensus on this question.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Australia. Would any other member like to take the floor? It seems not, so perhaps I could move on to other matters. The secretariat has circulated today working paper CD/WP.405, relating to a request from a non-member to participate in our work. I have already been informed by the coordinators that there is no objection to that request, and I therefore suggest that we take it up directly at this plenary meeting. As there is general agreement on the draft decision, there seems to be no need now for an informal meeting, on the understanding that this action does not set a precedent for the future consideration of requests from non-members. May I take it that the Conference adopts the draft decision?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Angola will be informed accordingly.

I wish now to turn to the timetable of meetings to be held during the coming week by the Conference and its subsidiary bodies. The secretariat has circulated an informal paper containing the timetable which, as usual, is merely indicative and may be changed, if the need arises. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Conference adopts the timetable.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: In connection with the timetable, I should like to inform you that at our next plenary meeting on 6 June we will receive the visit of a number of high-level governmental representatives, including one head of government, who will be addressing the Conference on that day. The secretariat is already making arrangements with the delegations concerned in order that our proceedings run smoothly. In particular, it will be necessary to ensure that the sequence of statements, as well as the arrival of the high-level visitors, should proceed without any complications and, if I may say so, one essential element will be that we should start our plenary meeting punctually. May I invite you, therefore, to be here by the time scheduled for the opening of the plenary meeting on that day, and that will be 10 o'clock?

May I now turn to a different subject? I am informed by the secretariat that the list of participants, which was issued earlier in the annual session, is now being updated and will appear shortly, incorporating the changes reported since that time. I should be grateful if those delegations wishing to introduce any further changes to the list would inform the secretariat not later than Tuesday, 4 June at noon, so that the new list might be issued very soon thereafter.

I have no other business for today. Before adjourning this plenary meeting, I wish to recall that, in accordance with our timetable of meetings for this week, the Conference shall hold an informal meeting on the substance of agenda item 2, entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", immediately after this plenary meeting. The next plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will be held on Thursday, 6 June, at 10 a.m., and promptly please.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.